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SUBJECT: A PREVIEW OF SEPTEMBER'S LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

REF: LUANDA 0471

Classified By: AMB DAN MOZENA FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (U) SUMMARY: The September 5, 2008 legislative election will be Angola's first in 16 years and only the second in its history. Although the country's political landscape is difficult to read, an analysis of Angola's electoral system, the electoral playing field, and the results of the 1992 election sheds some light on what we can expect in the coming months. END SUMMARY

#### The Angolan Electoral System

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12. (U) The Angolan National Assembly is elected through closed party-list proportional representation. Of its 220 deputies, 130 are elected at large in what is called the National Circuit (NC), in which seats are allotted in proportion to parties' nationwide vote tally, and 90 are elected from the 18 Provincial Circuits (PC), or 5 deputies for each of the 18 provinces. After the total number NC or PC seats are allotted to parties in proportion to their national or provincial tallies, individual candidates are assigned seats based on their ranked order on the party's closed list. In both circuits the method used to allocate seats (the d'Hondt method) disproportionately favors larger parties over small parties. Based on the number of currently registered voters and predictions for generally high voter turnout, we estimate that parties will need to win at least 60,000 votes to win a seat in the national circuit.

#### Election Assumptions: Peaceful, Credible...

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13. (SBU) All indicators point to generally peaceful and credible elections in September. Political parties, civil society and religious leaders are united in their calls for high voter turnout and the need to respect electoral institutions and the poll results; all seek peaceful elections. The MPLA is eager to cement its war-time victory with a victory at the polls; UNITA is equally determined to distance itself from its history of armed insurgency while showing it is a political force to be reckoned with. There is no expectation that the elections will provoke widespread or organized violence, and, unlike 1992, the opposition does not have an armed force standing by in case things go south. Sporadic, spontaneous violence is likely, precipitated in most cases by logistical snags or non-organized provocations from local party zealots. Opposition parties have already reported increased political tensions, which have in some cases escalated into violence (reftel).

... but a Far Cry from Fair.

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14. (C) The playing field for elections will not, however, be level - the ruling MPLA holds too many of the cards. The government controls most media outlets, including the only daily newspaper, the only TV network, and the only nationwide

radio station, all of whom allot only perfunctory coverage to opposition party activities. Independent newspapers, radio, and civil society elements are often critical of the government, but routinely limit such criticism through self-censorship and periodically face threats of suspension, closure, or other legal action. The state, perceived by many to be synonymous with the MPLA, is the country's largest employer, and in most provinces virtually the only source of employment in the formal, non-agricultural sector. Many Angolans believe one must join the MPLA to get government jobs, and opposition parties will have to work hard to debunk the belief that jobs will be lost if the MPLA loses, or that the MPLA has methods of discovering who did and did not toe the line. The MPLA's influence extends to the village level; in many provinces traditional leaders (sobas) are selected by the MPLA rather than through traditional heredity lines. Yet to be seen is the extent to which sobas can deliver votes to the MPLA, or how many will use their local authority to block opposition political parties from campaigning freely in their village. Election officials have recently worked to educate sobas around the country on electoral laws and codes of conduct.

#### Building Democratic Institutions for the Future

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¶5. (SBU) These elections will not be perfect, but are expected to be an important building block in the construction of democratic institutions in Angola. They are the first elections under the 2005 Electoral Law, which was drafted to address problem areas in the 1992 elections. As the electoral law is untested, numerous regulatory and logistical questions are rising; both the law and its

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accompanying regulations are vague and subject to varying interpretations. September's legislative elections will help work out the kinks prior to the big race, the presidential election provisionally slated for 2009.

#### By the Numbers: A Look at the Provinces

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¶6. (U) As the September 2008 legislative election is the first in 16 years and only the second in Angola's history, the political landscape is essentially a blank slate in which little is known about the drivers that will affect voter participation and selection. Almost half of the electorate is comprised of first-time voters; there are over 3.2 million more voters for this contest than in the 1992 elections. Even indicators that are often reliable in other African countries, such as links between ethnicity and voting behavior, are unknown in Angola, as massive population shifts during the war are believed to have weakened ethnic/tribal ties. A look at past and current trends in various provinces can, however, shine some light on what we might expect when Angola's 8.3 million plus registered voters go to the polls.

Key Prizes: Luanda, Huila, Benguela, Huambo, Bie and Cabinda

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LUANDA

¶7. (C) Luanda, the largest electoral prize, will be the election's most fiercely-contested battleground. Its over 2.3 million registered voters represent more than thirty percent of the total electorate. In 1992 the MPLA carried 8 of 9 municipalities and won 4 of 5 PC seats (UNITA won the 5th), but pundits question the MPLA's ability to repeat its lopsided victory. Although the impact of ethnicity in these elections is unclear, observers believe the large influx of Umbundus, UNITA's traditional base of support, in Luanda augurs well for UNITA. Discontent with the prevailing poverty and the party deemed responsible for the city's wretched condition runs high in Luanda; most residents face extreme social-economic hardship and receive limited social services while living in close proximity to the nation's

wealthy elite. Poor management and planning have impeded the delivery of the government's post-war reconstruction efforts, fueling the sentiment that the government is not acting in the best interest of the people. Luandans also have much better access to varied sources of information and ideas than the rest of the country; Luanda-based independent radio stations and newspapers often discuss social inequity, corruption, and opposition political party calls for change. Reflecting, perhaps, this discontent, a recent BBC poll showed 70.5 percent of 499 people surveyed in the province stated they intend to vote in September's election because they want a change of government. (NOTE: The BBC poll is a useful indicator of public opinion, but should be analyzed with caution, as it was not conducted by random sample. ENE NOTE)

¶8. (C) UNITA and other opposition parties are, therefore, pinning their hopes on the discontent of the Luanda electorate. Luanda is the province in which the MPLA party structure, down to the neighborhood level, is least able to exercise control over people's lives, due largely to the fact that Luanda has more economic options outside the party and the state. Opposition votes are, however likely to be spread among various small opposition parties, notably the Front for Democracy (FpD), which is popular among intellectuals and artists, the Alliance of Youth, Workers and Peasants (PAJOCA), which has attracted moderates and human rights activists, and PADEPA, which has strong support among Luanda's many disenfranchised youth. While the MPLA and UNITA will likely split Luanda's five seats on the PC, the small parties are angling to win a seat or two on the NC register.

#### HUILA

¶9. (C) The more than 820,000 registered voters in Huila represent ten percent of the electorate. The MPLA has traditionally enjoyed strong support in this southern province; it won 4 of 5 PC seats in 1992 and is likely to dominate the province again. Huila has a strong independent business community which benefits from the status quo and is home to the largest Angolan white community, which traditionally shows little support for UNITA. The province was largely spared the hardships of the war, has been among the first benefit from the war's end and the GRA's subsequent rebuilding spree, and is home to many small ethnic groups that prevent an ethnic-based shift towards any one party. The Liberal Democratic Party (PLD), FpD, and PADEPA hope to pick up votes from both the MPLA and UNITA in Huila, contributing to their chances for seats on the NC.

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#### BENGUELA

¶10. (C) The central coast province of Benguela is the third largest circuit, with over 766,000 potential voters. Once a UNITA province - the party won 3 of 5 PC seats in 1992 - heavy GRA investment in the province has strengthened the MPLA's position, especially in the relatively prosperous urban centers of Lobito and Benguela. If ethnic factors still factor strongly into voter's decision making, however, Benguela's Umbundu majority may tilt the balance towards UNITA's favor on the PC.

#### HUAMBO and BIE

¶11. (C) Huambo's 600,000 and Bie's 454,000 voters are in the Umbundu ethnic heartland, and the provinces are still seen as UNITA territory. The party won 9 of 10 PC seats in the two provinces 1992. This hasn't prevented the MPLA from trying hard to win over voters, and the extensive fighting and damage in both provinces after the failed 1992 elections have damaged UNITA's credibility. Insiders believe it is a point of pride for the MPLA to have a strong showing there as a sign of their complete victory against UNITA. It is

equally important for UNITA to show it can still rally the party faithful. Small parties are likely to face problems winning votes here. Some, including the Social Renovation Party (PRS) and PLD, have worked to establish themselves as viable alternates for people who became disenchanted with both sides during the long civil war.

#### CABINDA

¶12. (C) Cabinda is a different sort of prize. Its 170,000 voters make it one of the smallest electoral circuits (12th of 18,) but the MPLA wants to use Cabindan voter support and turnout to discredit separatist elements in the province. Opposition parties, however, see the province's discontented elements as an opportunity to filch PC seats from the MPLA, which won 4 of 5 seats there in 1992. Tensions remain high in the province despite the August 2006 signing of a Memorandum of Peace and Understanding between the GRA and one faction of the separatist Front for the Liberation of Cabinda (FLEC), and opposition parties, notably UNITA, FpD and PRS, are working to capture the support of Cabindan civil society and religious leaders, with the hope that voters will follow their lead.

MPLA Strongholds: Kwanza Norte and Sul, Malange, Bengo, Namibe, Cunene

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¶13. (C) This group covers a large swath of the country, encompasses various ethnic groups, and ranges from the 5th largest voting population in the country (Kwanza Sul, with 524,000 registered voters) to the smallest (Bengo, with more than 134,000.) What they share is a history of strong MPLA support; in 1992 the party picked up 27 of the 30 PC seats held by these provinces. These provinces combined represent over 1.5 million voters.

Up for Grabs: Zaire, Uige

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¶14. (C) Zaire split between the MPLA (2 seats), Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA, 2 seats) and UNITA (1 seat) in the 92 elections; Uige split at 3 for MPLA and 2 for UNITA. These provinces are home to the Bakongo, the FNLA's traditional base of support. The FNLA has, however, been weakened by years of infighting. Though the Constitutional Court recently struck down one of the factions' leadership claim, the party's ability to unite in advance of elections remains unclear. Pundits consider the combined 587,000 voters in these two provinces to be in play.

The Wild West: The Lundas, Moxico and Kuando Kubango

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¶15. (C) This vast, scantily populated region is often referred to as "the end of the earth" due to its isolation from the rest of the country. Vast swaths of land in these provinces are virtually off limits due to diamond concessions; poverty is grinding and social services extremely limited. Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul, home to the ethnic Chokwe, are still seen as the PRS stronghold; the party won took 3 PC seats in the two provinces in '92. This was seen as an incredible victory coming from a newly-formed party, and the PRS has used the intervening years to attract members outside its Chokwe base. The PRS is now seen as a contender in Moxico, where over 250,000 returning refugees were repatriated to Moxico by the GRA following the end of the civil war with little more than a starter kit of domestic items and farming

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tools. Returnees, who in many cases received better educational opportunities and were privy to wider sources of information in refugee camps than those who stayed in Angola, may serve to change the voting pattern in the province, which in 1992 handed 4 PC seats to the MPLA and 1 to UNITA. Returnees may also affect voting patterns in Kuando Kubango,

which in 1992 gave 4 seats to UNITA and 1 to the MPLA. These four provinces combined represent over 827,000 registered voters.

Comment: Much Ado About Something

¶16. (C) COMMENT: Much is at stake in the upcoming elections. The new National Assembly, which by law will form 30 days after the results are announced, is responsible for drafting a new constitution. The MPLA covets a large enough majority to push through its governance plan and strengthen the power of the executive; opposition parties desperately want enough seats to make their voices heard at the bargaining table. In addition, both the results and the conduct of parties during the campaign will go a long way toward shaping strategies for the 2009 presidential race. Perhaps most importantly, these elections play an important role in calming the Angolan electorate's fears about elections and mark an important building block in the construction of democratic institutions and traditions in Angola. END COMMENT

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